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DRAFT REPORT

on the 2023 and 2024 Commission reports on North Macedonia
(2025/2021(INI))

Committee on Foreign Affairs

Rapporteur: Thomas Waitz

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on the 2023 and 2024 Commission reports on North Macedonia (2025/2021(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of North Macedonia, of the other part¹,
- having regard to North Macedonia's application for membership of the European Union, submitted on 22 March 2004,
- having regard to the European Council decision of 16 December 2005 to grant North Macedonia EU candidate country status,
- having regard to the European Council conclusions of 19-20 June 2003, including the annex thereto entitled 'The Thessaloniki agenda for the Western Balkans: Moving towards European integration',
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/1529 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 September 2021 establishing the Instrument for Pre-Accession assistance (IPA III)²,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2024/1449 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on establishing the Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans³,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 5 February 2020 entitled 'Enhancing the accession process – A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans' (COM(2020)0057),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 8 November 2023 entitled '2023 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy' (COM(2023)0690), accompanied by the Commission staff working document entitled 'North Macedonia 2023 Report' (SWD(2023)0693),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 8 November 2023 entitled 'New growth plan for the Western Balkans' (COM(2023)0691),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 20 March 2024 on pre-enlargement reforms and policy reviews (COM(2024)0146),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 24 July 2024 entitled '2024 Rule of Law Report' (COM(2024)0800), accompanied by the Commission staff working

¹ OJ L 84, 20.3.2004, p. 13, ELI: [http://data.europa.eu/eli/agree_internation/2004/239\(2\)/oj](http://data.europa.eu/eli/agree_internation/2004/239(2)/oj).

² OJ L 330, 20.9.2021, p. 1, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1529/oj>.

³ OJ L, 2024/1449, 24.5.2024, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1449/oj>.

- document entitled ‘2024 Rule of Law Report – Country Chapter on the rule of law situation in North Macedonia’ (SWD(2024)0830),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 30 October 2024 entitled ‘2024 Communication on EU enlargement policy’ (COM(2024)0690), accompanied by the Commission staff working document entitled ‘North Macedonia 2024 Report’ (SWD(2024)0693),
 - having regard to the Reform Agenda of North Macedonia as approved by the Commission under the Reform and Growth Facility on 23 October 2024,
 - having regard to the final report of 23 September 2024 of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe’s Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) Election Observation Mission on North Macedonia’s presidential election on 24 April 2024 and parliamentary elections on 8 May 2024,
 - having regard to the declarations of the EU-Western Balkans summits of 13 December 2023 and of 18 December 2024 in Brussels,
 - having regard to the Berlin Process launched on 28 August 2014,
 - having regard to its previous resolutions on North Macedonia,
 - having regard to Rule 55 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A10-0000/2025),
- A. whereas North Macedonia has held EU candidate country status since 2005 and successfully completed the screening process in December 2023;
- B. whereas the aspirations of citizens of North Macedonia to become part of the EU have led to considerable progress in terms of democracy and socio-economic reforms, while the accession process continues to experience blockages for various unwarranted reasons;
- C. whereas North Macedonia is a trustworthy partner, fully aligned with the EU’s common foreign and security policy;
- D. whereas North Macedonia needs to adopt the outstanding constitutional reforms so that accession negotiations can start swiftly;
1. Reiterates its full support for North Macedonia’s wish to join the EU;
 2. Recalls the need to maintain the momentum and credibility of the European integration process; notes that North Macedonia continues to demonstrate commitment to EU integration and alignment with EU policies; calls for the swift advancement of accession negotiations, while noting the importance of adopting the concerted constitutional amendments; encourages all political parties in North Macedonia to engage in constructive dialogue to achieve the necessary consensus on these amendments, which would strengthen the country’s multi-ethnic character and accelerate its progress towards EU membership;

3. Welcomes the new Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans which will provide EUR 750 million in grants and loans to North Macedonia;
4. Welcomes the continued stability of interethnic relations and the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement;
5. Urges North Macedonia to intensify efforts to strengthen the rule of law and judicial independence, counter corruption, reform its public administration and improve the transparency and concentration of media ownership;

Functioning of democratic institutions

6. Notes that, while democratic institutions in North Macedonia function satisfactorily, political polarisation remains a stumbling block to necessary reforms;
7. Welcomes the adoption of new rules of procedure by the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia (*Sobranie*), facilitated by the European Parliament within the framework of the Jean Monnet Dialogue; emphasises that cross-party collaboration remains vital to accelerate the implementation of EU-related reforms and strengthen democratic institutions;
8. Stresses that, while amendments to the Electoral Code have been made, comprehensive electoral reform is still needed; calls strongly for the implementation of the outstanding recommendations made by the ODIHR and the Venice Commission;
9. Calls for improved regulation of the financing of political parties and campaigns, including measures to increase transparency;
10. Calls for the continued modernisation of a merit-based public administration, addressing systemic challenges of politicisation and strengthening transparent recruitment processes;
11. Calls for further steps to ensure the systemic accountability of public institutions through meaningful and public stakeholder consultations;
12. Urges the authorities of North Macedonia to refrain from opaque, politicised dismissals from, and appointments to, positions within independent bodies and agencies, as well as to ensure that the organisations are adequately funded and that decisions and recommendations are implemented consistently;

Media and civil society

13. Recalls the need to reform the legal framework governing online and offline media to align fully with the European Media Freedom Act⁴;
14. Reiterates its calls for the comprehensive reform of the rules governing state financing and political party advertising in the media;

⁴ Regulation (EU) 2024/1083 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 April 2024 establishing a common framework for media services in the internal market and amending Directive 2010/13/EU (European Media Freedom Act), OJ L, 2024/1083, 17.4.2024, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1083/oj>.

15. Encourages actions to enhance the editorial and financial independence, impartiality and professionalism of public service broadcasters and media regulators;
16. Notes, with concern, the continued threats and attacks against journalists; welcomes the assignment of a dedicated prosecutor to monitor attacks on journalists and the establishment of cyberbullying reporting mechanisms;
17. Calls for strengthened measures to support investigative journalism and media literacy in order to combat hate speech, disinformation and foreign interference;
18. Welcomes the country's vibrant and constructive civil society, which plays a very crucial and positive role in the reform process; notes that, while civil society organisations operate in an overall enabling environment, legal and financial frameworks need to be implemented to ensure transparent public funding mechanisms;

Fundamental rights

19. Expresses concern about the lack of progress in gender equality and the rise of anti-gender movements; urges the country's authorities to improve access to services for victims of gender-based violence;
20. Notes that interethnic relations remain stable and the Ohrid Framework Agreement continues to be implemented; calls for adequate funding and staffing for institutions protecting the rights of non-majority communities;
21. Notes that persons with disabilities continue to face significant barriers as the country's legislation is still not aligned with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
22. Welcomes the first court ruling on hate speech against the LGBTIQ community, but calls strongly for the systematic prosecution of all instances of hate speech, hate crimes and intimidation;
23. Calls on North Macedonia to strengthen migration management, improve alignment with the EU *acquis* and address persistent challenges in handling regular and irregular migration;

Rule of law

24. Notes, with serious concern, that the country's track record in fighting corruption has worsened, particularly owing to Criminal Code amendments that have weakened the legal framework, resulting in the termination of many ongoing cases;
25. Notes that the perceived level of trust in the judiciary remains very low; calls for the independence, transparency and effective functioning of judicial bodies to be strengthened;
26. Notes, with concern, the lack of progress in preventing and fighting corruption and that financial investigations remain an area of weakness; calls for the operational capacity and cooperation of structures responsible for fighting organised crime and financial crime to be strengthened;

27. Calls for the independence of security and intelligence bodies to be strengthened through appropriate regulatory frameworks;
28. Calls for further efforts to build resilience against foreign interference and information manipulation;

Socio-economic reforms

29. Recommends that North Macedonia continue to pursue steps to improve the business climate and infrastructure, strengthen education and digital infrastructure, and enhance social protection systems;
30. Encourages North Macedonia to advance its digital transformation; underlines the need to address the brain drain, especially of medical and young professionals;

Environment, energy and transport

31. Recalls that additional efforts are needed to meet the targets for energy efficiency, renewable energy, security of supply and emissions reductions; urges the country's authorities to align its environment and climate change legislation with the EU *acquis* and to ensure its enforcement;
32. Stresses the urgent need to improve air quality; strongly urges the authorities to step up measures on biodiversity, water, air and climate protection, and regional waste management;
33. Urges the country's authorities to step up efforts to upgrade transport and energy infrastructure and regional connectivity and to address persistent delays in critical infrastructure development;

Regional cooperation and foreign policy

34. Welcomes North Macedonia's valuable contributions to regional cooperation and stability via its engagement in regional initiatives;
35. Praises the country's commitment to nurturing good neighbourly relations and its role as a model for the peaceful resolution of bilateral disputes through dialogue and mutual understanding; recalls, in that sense, that bilateral agreements should be implemented with tangible results in good faith by all sides, including the Prespa Agreement with Greece and the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation with Bulgaria; calls for consistent commitment to dialogue and cooperation with neighbouring countries to foster mutual trust;
36. Welcomes North Macedonia's continued commitment to Euro-Atlantic security; commends the country's alignment with the EU's foreign, security and defence policy, as well as its full compliance hitherto with restrictive measures related to Russia;
37. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the President of the European Council, the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the governments

and parliaments of the Member States, and the President, Government and Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia;

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

The European Parliament closely monitors political and socio-economic development in the enlargement countries and the standing rapporteur of the European Parliament usually presents its report following the Commission's enlargement package. As the newly appointed standing rapporteur for North Macedonia, I have the honour to present my first report in response to the Commission's 2023 and 2024 country reports. With this report, I aim to provide a balanced assessment of North Macedonia's complex political context while urging political stakeholders to advance reforms, honour past agreements, and I call on EU institutions and Member States to prevent future bilateral blockades and provide the country with the necessary assurances and tailor-made support.

With the successful implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement (2001) the country became a role model in the region for the peaceful resolution of ethnic disputes through dialogue and mutual understanding. Only four years after the signature of this agreement, North Macedonia obtained candidate status in 2005, and has long been a frontrunner in the region. The country has undertaken impressive and difficult reforms—including a historic name change—yet its accession process has been obstructed for far too long due to bilateral disputes. In 2022, to overcome Bulgaria's veto on accession talks, the EU included Bulgaria's demands in the Council conclusions related to North Macedonia's accession, with the EU acting as guarantor of their implementation. The so-called French proposal, however, set a concerning precedent by allowing the accession process to be used for resolving cultural and historical disputes. While this agreement ultimately led to the lifting of the veto, the first Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) on July 19, 2022, and the start of screening, it also required North Macedonia to amend its Constitution to include the Bulgarian minority. Screening sessions for all six clusters were completed by December 7, 2023, and the country will be able to move to the next phase of negotiations once the constitutional amendments are adopted.

Years of setbacks and unfulfilled promises have understandably led to frustration, disappointment and a continuous decline in public support for EU integration in North Macedonia. However, amid these times of major shifts in the international world order as Europe knows it, there is a renewed sense of urgency and an important opportunity to advance the accession process. All political stakeholders, particularly Members of Parliament from the ruling coalition and the government, must seize this moment and engage in constructive dialogue to achieve consensus on the aforementioned constitutional amendments. The EU and its Member States must fully support this endeavour, including providing assurances that the constitutional changes will not lead to further bilateral demands.

North Macedonia has drafted an excellent and ambitious reform agenda – arguably one of the best in the region. Its rigorous implementation would put the country back on track, especially in key areas such as fighting corruption, ensuring judicial independence, reforming public administration, and improving the situation of media freedom. However, some recent developments, including the country's decision to abstain from the latest European resolution on Ukraine in the UN General Assembly while co-sponsoring the U.S. resolution in February 2025, have raised concerns among North Macedonia's EU supporters about its long-term trajectory.

I sincerely hope that all parties—North Macedonia's authorities, EU institutions, and

neighbouring countries—recognise the urgency of the moment and act decisively to move forward.

As for the responsibility of this House, I am committed to building a stable, constructive, pro-European, pro-democratic, and pro-enlargement alliance in support of North Macedonia's EU accession. I hope to secure the support of every Member who shares this goal.

**ANNEX: ENTITIES OR PERSONS
FROM WHOM THE RAPPOREUR HAS RECEIVED INPUT**

Pursuant to Article 8 of Annex I to the Rules of Procedure, the rapporteur declares that he received input from the following entities or persons in the preparation of the draft report:

Entity and/or person
Please insert a person or an entity.

The list above is drawn up under the exclusive responsibility of the rapporteur.

Where natural persons are identified in the list by their name, by their function or by both, the rapporteur declares that he has submitted to the natural persons concerned the European Parliament's Data Protection Notice No 484 (<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/data-protect/index.do>), which sets out the conditions applicable to the processing of their personal data and the rights linked to that processing.